Gateway have just named J.R. "Bob" Dobbs the president of the Pindial division.

I think we can all take this as very positive news, given Dobbs' history, NDI-wise.

Jim Euliano <jime@flatech.edu> wrote:

While maintaining several key "corporate secrets" about the new design, Pindial was able to reveal that the new system will in no way support traditional floor cleaning utilities. The Broom 2000, the Mop 4000, and even the Vacuum 1200 will not be compatible with the new units. Even having one of the older models in close proximity to the "Sweeper NG" will possibly cause it to malfunction.

Fourth Quarter profit margins are expected to be in the ten's of dollars after the release of the Sweeper NG.

[Editor's Note: Those familiar with Commodore Amiga history will recognize the reference to the now infamous floor scrubber auctioned off at the Commodore liquidation sale. Amiga Inc.'s new President Jim Collas should take serious note of the black humor in this stronghold of the Amiga faithful. Other responses elicited by the St. Louis show: when Petro Tyschtschenko is openly referred to as a "dork" and when IRC sharpshooter are exhorted to "Take the shot" when Jeff Schindler appears in their sights, Amiga Inc. has serious PR problems with those they profess to want on their side.]

The Macintosh Section

Move Over MTV, Now There's MP3

by Kevin Savetz <savetz@northcoast.com>

My foray into the world of MP3 music began not online, but while staring at the TV. A particular car commercial was airing for the hundredth time that night, featuring an infectious little song based on a tune called 88 Lines about 44 Women. I wanted to hear the song in its entirety and knew the Internet would be the key.

My musical craving would also mean a chance to play with MP3, a high-quality audio format that has become quite popular in some Internet circles.

A search of DejaNews revealed the tune I longed to hear was by a new wave band called The Nails. Finding that information was easy. Finding the song itself was another matter, involving a frustrating foray into the world of pirate Web sites that claim to offer free (although not legal) MP3 files. Ultimately I did find the song - legally - on the official Nails home page. My thirst for '80s new wave was quenched, but I learned volumes about MP3 in the process.

<http://www.dejanews.com/>
<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/dakaufman/nails.html>

First Things First

MP3 stands for MPEG 1 layer 3: it's a file format for storing audio that can be replayed at near compact disc quality. The music sounds great. To my untrained ears, properly encoded MP3 files sound just as good as tunes from a CD. All it takes to play MP3 music is player software on your computer, which should be at least a PowerPC-based Mac (exact requirements vary by player). You also need something to listen to: MP3 files are available for download, or you can create them yourself from CDs you own.

Besides raw computing power, MP3 files require bandwidth and storage space. MP3 files weigh in at about one megabyte per minute of audio: your average pop song takes 3 or 4 MB; Arlo Guthrie's verbose Alice's Restaurant would run around 20 MB. In fact, MP3 files are amazingly small, taking up about 10 percent of the space of AIFF or other high-quality sound formats. (Like JPEG is to graphics, MPEG is a lossy compression format - some information is lost in encoding, but not enough that most people would notice.) If you're downloading MP3s, come armed with a fast connection or prepare for a long wait. Even if you're encoding the files yourself, make sure you have enough disk space.

Detailed information about MP3 and related file formats is available at the MPEG Archive. The site includes a brutally technical FAQ, player downloads for many platforms, and other information.

<http://www.mpeg1.de/>

Getting a Player

To hear your fabulous MP3 song files, you need an MP3 player.

Windows users enjoy a veritable cornucopia of MP3 players, but Mac users have fewer choices, including the popular MacAmp and SoundApp. MacAmp's interface resembles the front panel of a compact disc player, complete with track timer and equalizer blinky lights. There's also a playlist: you can drag your MP3 files onto the playlist and move them around to tweak the order in which they play.

SoundApp offers a simpler interface. Although it can play sounds of many types other than MP3, SoundApp includes only a rudimentary playlist feature. A list of other players for the Macintosh can be found at MP3.com's archive of Mac software.

<http://www.macamp.com/>
<http://www-cs-students.stanford.edu/~franke/SoundApp/>
<http://www.mp3.com/software/mac/players.html>

Downloading MP3s

There are two distinct types of MP3 files on the Internet - legal and illegal. Creators put legitimate MP3s online for you to enjoy: the people who own the copyright to the music have chosen to share. Legitimate MP3s songs are easy to find - and listening to them won't lead to an unsightly buildup of bad karma.

MP3.com reports that users downloaded more than two million songs from that site in September. According to the International Federation of Phonographic Industries, about 90 million MP3 files are downloaded each month - this presumably counts only legitimate ones.

The bad news? The mainstream recording industry hasn't embraced MP3, so legitimate recordings from well-known bands are rare. In fact, many people in the recording industry see MP3s as a major threat. Because it's so easy to create great-sounding MP3 files from a CD and share those files for free online, the recording industry stands to lose big bucks to do-it-yourself pirates who would rather trade songs than pay for a CD. So chances are your favorite Top 40 group isn't yet on the MP3 bandwagon.

That said, a few well-known artists and labels are experimenting with MP3. Among them are the Beastie Boys, Dionne Warwick, and Taylor Dayne. Some make selected tracks available for free to spur sales of CDs, while others take the next step of selling MP3 tunes directly via the Internet.

Most of the music on legitimate MP3 Web sites is from bands you've never heard, covering every genre from blues to techno. Just because you've never heard of these bands doesn't mean they're lousy - in fact, I've discovered some great music. Then again, there's a reason that others of these bands lurk in obscurity: they stink.

Two sites with massive collections of free, legitimate MP3 music files are MP3.com and the Internet Underground Music Archive. Both let you search for music by genre, but your findings will almost always be a crap shoot if you don't recognize band names. If you're interested in hearing new music and indie bands, this is a great way to do so. You'll be pleasantly surprised when you find a great song - but brace yourself for the truly bad ones.

<http://www.mp3.com/> <http://www.iuma.com/>

Illegal MP3s - music files shared without the permission of the copyright holders - also abound. If your favorite bands don't release MP3 music, folks on the Internet will do it for them. I could get on my soapbox and yammer about why piracy is wrong, but I won't. I'll just say this: trying to get music from pirate MP3 sites is a pain in the Hootie.

The sites are easy to find in search engines, but then you'll run into dead links galore, since ISPs quickly shut down such pirate sites.

Sites that do exist may only offer a handful of songs for download (but claim to have an archive of thousands). Other sites require you to upload a song for each one that you download. I'm no expert in the pirate MP3 scene, and maybe I don't know where to look, but two hours of searching the online backwaters yielded few MP3 files, none of which I even cared to hear.

An MP3 guru tells me Usenet is the tool of choice for receiving pirate MP3s, feeding two to three gigabytes of MP3 files daily, and accounting for more than 10 percent of all Usenet bandwidth.

Roll Your Own

Sharing copyrighted music is illegal, but it is legal to create MP3 files for your own use from CDs you own. Encoding a single song or an entire CD is simple if you're armed with a CD-ROM drive and encoding software. Creating an MP3 file from a CD track is a two-step process: first, you convert the CD audio to a file format native to the computer such as AIFF - this process is called ripping. Next, you convert that file to an MP3 file in a process called encoding. Depending on the software you use, ripping and encoding can be a one-step or two-step process.

You could rip your favorite tracks from otherwise forgettable CDs to create a "best of" MP3 mix folder. If you have removable storage like a Zip or Jaz drive, you could put those MP3 files onto a removable cartridge and enjoy your tunes whenever you're in the mood. (Giving copies of those files to anyone or uploading them to the Internet is copyright infringement.)

The only one-step Mac ripper/encoder I've found on the Internet is MPEG Audio Creator, which is easy to use. However, it can create only MPEG 1 layer 2 files (dubbed MP2), an older version and slightly larger version of the file format.

<http://www3.pair.com/odreer/mpeg.html>

Until someone writes a Mac MP3 ripping/encoding tool, creating true MP3 files requires two programs. You first use CDtoAIFF to create an AIFF file from a CD track. Then Mpecker Encoder turns that AIFF into an MP3 file.

<http://www.musicglobalnetwork.com/Mac.html>
<http://www.anime.net/~go/mpeckers.html>

Encoding an MP3 file is an intensive process, so be prepared to see a lot of the busy cursor.

There you have it: the story of how an incessant car commercial got me hooked on a forgotten '80s band, led me to learn more than I thought I wanted to know about MP3, and caused me to use every last bit of hard drive space to store countless music files. I gotta stop watching so much TV.

[Kevin Savetz writes about Macs and the Internet for Computer Shopper and other magazines. An avid collector of vintage computers, Kevin is as likely to be playing with an Atari 800 or Timex-Sinclair as with his Mac.]

[Source: TidBITS #455 / 16-Nov-98. TidBITS address is http://www.tidbits.com/tb-issues/default.html .]

The Amiga Section

The Continuing History of OS3.5

From the Team Amiga Mailing List and c.s.a.misc

Keith Blakemore-Noble <Amiga@computer.org> wrote:

3.5 was never "on then off then on again". OS3.5 was only "on" late in the day after sufficient pressure from users demanding 3.5.It has certainly not been "on, off and on again"...

Holger Kruse <kruse@nordicglobal.com> responded:

Looks like you don't have all the information. Let me provide some:

Plans for OS 3.5 go WAY back. The earliest time I was involved in them was summer 97, when a group of developers outlined a proposal for OS 3.5. It was accepted and endorsed by Petro and forwarded to Amiga Inc. There was no official, public announcement at the time, but OS 3.5 nevertheless was "on". Shortly after that Amiga Inc. signalled "no" -- "off again".

A few months later there was that famous agreement between [Haage & Partner] and Petro -- "on again". That was killed again by Amiga Inc., after lobbying by some Amiga developers -- "off again". Some members of ICOA were then officially appointed by Amiga Inc. (by the US side, NOT by Petro) to provide a counterproposal and cost calculation for OS 3.5, on behalf of Amiga Inc., i.e. Amiga Inc. very much wanted to produce OS 3.5 at that time -- "on again".

After a lot of details had already been worked out, those plans were then killed for the show in London -- "off again". After intense lobbying by Fleecy Amiga Inc. revived the plans for OS 3.5 -- "on again" -- at least until Fleecy was fired, and with him all of the pending agreements with developers Fleecy has helped work out -- "off again", at least for the developers involved.

At the show in Cologne Jeff [Schindler] then was very enthusiastic about a completely new OS 3.5, that was supposed to be much more comprehensive than in earlier plans, with completely new agreements on a much larger scope -- "on again, in a big way".

Only a few weeks later Amiga Inc. announced that those plans were already obsolete, by removing some of the most essential components (RTG and RTA) from the OS 3.5 proposal, which made some developers furious, and rightfully so. From that point on OS 3.5 seemed little more than a farce to me -- "still on, but only as a bad excuse". At least they still had control over it though.

Another few months later the people in charge of OS 3.5 at Amiga Inc. were reassigned, as part of the change in leadership at Amiga Inc., and control over OS 3.5 was turned over to Petro, who promptly outsourced it to H&P -- once again changing the direction OS 3.5 was supposed to go. Apparently H&P do not feel they have to honor any agreements Amiga Inc. made with developers in the past -- "still on, but who knows how...".

For the life of me I cannot honestly say that this sequence of decisions is indicative of any recognizable, logical overall strategy -- sorry.

>> PPC is the processor of choice,

*PPC was *never* the "processor of choice".*

You are, I presume, thinking of that "hardware FAQ" which was "released" by a former AInc employee where he said the PPC was official, even though AInc have always denied it was ever official (he also later said that was indeed the case, and that the "FAQ" was not really supposed to be released as it was not official).

So, PPC was never processor of choice, therefore that is one change which has not taken place.

There was more than just the "hardware FAQ". Amiga Inc. actually called several developers more than a month before the announcement, informing them that PPC would be the official new CPU. And, yes, that was official. The change away from PPC was made later after Alan was hired and wanted to change the direction.

*OS4 *WAS* the developer OS right from the start!!! Originally, there was to be a developer OS called OS4, then the final real OS called OS5.*

Not really... There are also the original plans for future OS versions announced at Cologne '97. They were quite different from the later OS5Dev vs. OS5 scheme, not just in naming but also conceptually.

Sure, I agree AInc have a lot to do, and could certainly have made things easier on themselves (e.g. by not having all the BIG hype